

Troubleshooting Parents' Special Education Concerns Within A Local School Division

As parents, you play an important role in working with school divisions to ensure that your child's education needs are met. However, when problems arise with your child's special education, you may not know what to do or whom to call. While the following information does not replace local school division policy, it may help you resolve your special education concerns by working with local school division staff.

Where do you begin?

At the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), we encourage you to resolve your special education concerns at the local school division level. School divisions, parents, and children benefit and build relationships when school divisions and parents work together to resolve problems.

Who do you contact within your local school division?

Think about what your issues are and who can best help you resolve them.

- As a first step, you may want to begin with your child's teacher or Individualized Education Program (IEP) committee. Be prepared to explain your concerns and to provide any documents that support your concerns.
- If you are not able to resolve your issues through discussion with your child's teacher or through discussion with your IEP committee or if these persons are not the appropriate initial contacts, arrange to meet with or speak by telephone with your school principal or assistant principal. Be prepared to explain your concerns and to provide any documents you have that support your concerns, if necessary. If these persons are not able to assist you, they should be able to identify an appropriate contact person. (In some cases, your child's guidance counselor may be able to provide information or assistance.)
- If you are not able to resolve your issues through discussion with the school principal or assistant principal and you are not able to identify another person you can discuss your issues with, contact your school division's special education director by telephone or in writing and ask for assistance. Many issues may be solved over the telephone. However, if you have a complicated issue, you may want to ask for an appointment to meet with the special education director or other designated special education staff in person. Again be prepared to explain your concerns and to provide any documents that support your concerns.
- If you choose to document your concerns by letter to the special education director, please be specific and concise. Remember to keep a copy of the letter and any submitted documentation for your records.

- You will find a list of the local school division special education directors for the state of Virginia on the VDOE Web site at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/leadir.pdf>

In addition, staff directories for local school divisions in Virginia are found at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/dbpubs/doedir/ea.html>

- Remember some school divisions have specific personnel, who work with parents to resolve special education issues. Your school division may have provided you with specific contact information at the beginning of the school year. If so, use that information to determine whom you need to speak with about your concerns.

What other options do you have in resolving your concerns?

If you need additional assistance in resolving issues relative to special education, **mediation** may be requested. Mediation is provided at no cost to parents. Information about mediation is located on the VDOE Web site at

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/ssems.html>

Please contact your school division if you wish to request mediation.

What can you do if you are not satisfied with the school division's decision?

Information about dispute resolution is available on the VDOE Web site at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/dueproc/>

What other resources are available to help parents?

- *A Parent's Guide to Special Education* was developed by the Virginia Department of Education to assist parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities relative to the special education process in Virginia's schools. This handbook is located on the department's Web site at:

http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/parent_guide.pdf

- Virginia's special education regulations are located on the VDOE Web site at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/varegs.pdf>

- Other information about special education in Virginia is available on the VDOE Web site at

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sess/>

- In addition, you will find information about special education in English and Spanish on the Web page for the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at:

<http://www.nichcy.org/>

This site is a source of information about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind, as it relates to children with disabilities.

- Parent resource centers are available to assist parents in many of the state's school divisions. You will find contact information for Virginia's parent resource centers at:

http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/prc_list.pdf

- The State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC) is organized and functions in accordance with state and federal requirements. The Virginia Board of Education appoints members of this committee. You will find more information about this committee at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/sseac.html>

- You will find a list of advocacy organizations that provide services and resources to parents and children with special education needs on this department's Web site at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/dueproc/LglAdvGrpsforSpEdCases.pdf>

- The Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) assists families and professionals through training, advocacy, and program development. You will find more information about PEATC at:

<http://www.peatc.org/>

- In addition, a staff directory for VDOE staff is located at:

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/dbpubs/doedir/DOE/doe.html>